United Nations

Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ On second day of election in Cambodia, 70 per cent of registered voters have cast their ballot with few violent incidents; "guarded optimism" is rule for UNTAC, says UNTAC spokesman; Security Council, in Presidential statement, condemns recent shelling of UNTAC resulting in death of two Chinese personnel and wounding of seven others.

+ In Western Sahara, both sides show "desire to move towards early referendum", according to report by Secretary-General; will visit Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, as well as MINURSO in first week of June "to make one more effort to seek a compromise solution".

+ New round of joint meetings between leaders of two communities in Cyprus, chaired by Secretary-General, begins at Headquarters; Permanent Members of Security Council and new Special Representative for Cyprus to participate for first time.

+ "Important" negotiations on Haiti are continuing, says Secretary-General's Special Envoy upon arrival in Port-au-Prince; calls upon all parties to help achieve solution to crisis.

+ Vieri Traxler, former Permanent Representative of Italy to United Nations, appointed by Secretary-General as Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs for Sudan; will visit region to focus international attention on humanitarian crisis.

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+ Secretary-General's Personal Envoy visited East Timor for human rights information, not to influence individuals, United Nations says in response to allegations in Indonesian media.

+ UNHCR to help almost 100,000 refugees to return to Mali over next two years; security situation there considerably improved since National Pact between Government and opposition groups.

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For information media—not an official record

+ Some 14 million people infected with HIV which causes AIDS; 30 to 40 million people will have virus by year 2000, according to WHO estimates.

+ Granting of Asturias Award to United Nations Protection Force in former Yugoslavia is "great encouragement" for peace-keepers operating in "difficult environment", says Secretary-General.

+ Families are essential to fabric of society, Secretary-General says in message to Asian and Pacific Preparatory Meeting in Beijing for 1994 International Year of Family.

+ Governing Council of UNEP decides to give priority to capacity-building programmes in developing countries; approves $120 to $130 million to 1994-1995 UNEP programme budget, subject to availability of funds.

+ Secretary-General says Rotary International is part of emerging international public opinion in favour of a stronger United Naticns; cites Rotary's support as example of non-governmental cooperation with Organization.

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The process of bringing peace to Cambodia through elections as foreseen by the 1991 Paris Accords was now approaching its final fulfilment, according to Nabil Saad reporting for United Nations Radio in Phnom Penh. As of today, on the second day of the six-day election, 70 percent of Cambodians had cast their ballot with few violent incidents. In Cambodia's capital city, he said, voters had fought the monsoon rain and political difficulties to express their will. The final results, which are expected on 2 or 3 June, would determine the future of Cambodia.

Mr. Saad also reported that polling stations, which had been shelled by the Khmer Rouge, had reopened only a few hours later. In one case, 200 Khmer Rouge soldiers had presented themselves unarmed to a polling station and were allowed to vote.

According to a spokesman for the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), "guarded optimism" continued to be the rule for United Nations electoral officers. There was only one more day of polling at the fixed stations and four more days at mobile stations, he said.

Meanwhile, the Security Council has strongly condemned the recent shelling of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) at which two Chinese engineering personnel were killed and seven others were wounded. In a statement read out by Council President Yuliy Vorontsov (Russian Federation) on Saturday, 22 May, the Council said it took note of a preliminary report that the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea (NADK) had carried out the attack. The Council further asked for an investigation of the incident.

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In Western Sahara, after months of consultations between the United Nations and the parties, both sides were now showing "a desire to move towards an early referendum", according to a new report by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, dated 21 May. The Secretary-General had therefore decided to visit the United Nations Mission area in Western Sahara in the first week of June "to make one more effort to seek a compromise solution" and to underscore that the Settlement Plan must be implemented without further delay.

The Secretary-General's Special Representative, Sahabzada Yaqub-Khan, who travelled to the area in March, has reported back that "some progress had been made" in the talks as Morocco had not expressed objections to the main elements of the outline of a proposed compromise. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLISARIO) had, for its part, not rejected the compromise outright. POLISARIO had however maintained its earlier reservations about the crucial aspects of the criteria for eligibility to vote.

Both sides had confirmed their desire to proceed promptly with the registration of voters and to cooperate with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). They had also agreed to let tribal chiefs as well as observers from either side participate in the registration process. A 10-member Identification Commission would be established to begin voter registration in June.

Because of delays in the implementation of the Settlement Plan, MINURSO's primary function is restricted to verifying the cease-fire and the cessation of hostilities. Under the plan, signed by both parties in August 1988, the referendum in Western Sahara should have taken place in January 1992.
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A new round of joint talks between the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus -- the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots -- were to begin at Headquarters this afternoon, according to a United Nations spokesman. The joint talks, which began last summer, would be chaired by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. The Security Council President and Permanent Members of Council were also to attend "for the first time" in the talks on Cyprus, together with the Secretary-General's new Special Representative for Cyprus, Joe Clark, former Prime Minister of Canada.

The Secretary-General was going to be personally involved in the talks, which were expected to end this week prior to his departure this weekend, the spokesman said.

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The talks on the Haitian crisis were continuing and the elements for its resolution were now at hand, according to Dante Caputo, Special Envoy of the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS).

In a statement upon arrival in Port-au-Prince, on Saturday, 22 May, he expressed the hope that the talks, which he said must remain confidential, could lead towards a solution to the political crisis in that country.

To that end, Mr. Caputo called upon all parties, including all sectors of Haitian society, to be responsible and to demonstrate "a spirit of generosity and dignity".

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has asked Vieri Traxler, former Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, to visit Sudan and other countries in the region as Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs for the Sudan. The Special Envoy's mission is intended to focus greater international attention on the humanitarian crisis in the Sudan, particularly the areas affected by civil conflict, according to a United Nations spokesman.

Mr. Traxler would assess the situation first hand and consult with concerned parties on ways to meet humanitarian needs, the spokesman said. In addition to the Sudan, he would visit Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda, and would consult with authorities in Nigeria, who had recently hosted peace talks between the Sudanese Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

Mr. Traxler would be assisted in his mission by Charles LaMunière, Deputy to Under-Secretary-General Jan Eliasson in the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, Geneva.

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The Secretary-General's Personal Envoy, Amos Wako, recently undertook a mission to East Timor to gather information on the human rights situation in the light of the Dili incident of 12 November 1991, according to a statement by the Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Jakarta. The statement was issued in response to allegations in the Indonesian media that Mr. Wako might have used his meeting with Mr. "Xanana" Gusmao in Dili to seek to influence his attitude in the remaining states of his trial.

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The Personal Envoy's task was to ask questions and to hear views and to report confidentially to the Secretary-General, the statement said. "The idea that Mr. Wako might have played any active role at such meetings, let alone provide encouragement to anyone towards any particular course of action, is entirely without foundation", stressed the statement.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has said it would help almost 100,000 refugees who fled fighting in Mali to return home over the next two years. Some 42,000 refugees had fled to eastern Mauritania, 50,000 to southern Algeria and 6,000 to Burkina Faso.

The security situation in Mali had improved considerably since the signing in April 1992 of a National Pact between the Government of Mali and opposition movements in the north, according to UNHCR. As a result, many refugees wanted to return and about 2,000 had already done so spontaneously.

UNHCR said it planned to organize a voluntary repatriation of 12,000 refugees from early July to December 1993, at a cost of $3.5 million. UNHCR and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) were establishing assistance programmes for the returnees.

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Some 14 million people have been infected with HIV, the human immunodeficiency virus, which causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), according the World Health Organization (WHO). The Agency estimates that between 30 and 40 million people will have the virus by the year 2000.

Sub-Saharan Africa was the worst affected area, with over 8 million people infected. Cities have borne the greatest burden, but the virus was following roads and rivers into the African countryside, WHO said. The most alarming trends were in south and south-east Asia, where over 1.5 million adults were infected. Most reported infections were in India and Thailand, but high rates had been seen elsewhere in the region.

"Parts of the world face a catastrophe because of AIDS", said Dr. Michael Merson, Director of the WHO Global Programme on AIDS. He warned that massive financial and political commitment would be needed to slow the epidemic.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has expressed his pleasure to accept the prestigious Prince of Asturias Award for International Cooperation for the year 1993.

In a press release issued today at Headquarters, the Secretary-General stressed that the decision of the Prince of Asturias Foundation to award UNPROFOR was a "welcome recognition" for the Force's efforts to end the bloodshed in the former Yugoslavia and a great encouragement for it to continue implementing its mandate in a "difficult environment".

There are currently over 23,000 members of UNPROFOR in the former Yugoslavia.

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Throughout history, families have been essential to the fabric of society, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said in a message to the opening of the United Nations Asia and Pacific Preparatory Meeting of the 1994 International Year of the Family, which opened in Beijing today. The message was read out by Henryk Sokalski, Coordinator for the International Year.

It was in the families that one must also find the first fullest expression of equality between men and women, and the full security and recognition of the human rights of chidren, the message said. Mr. Boutros-Ghali also noted that families were at the leading edge of change and were adapting to serious challenges, often under very demanding conditions. Refugee families, migrant families and single-parent families all faced serious problems demanding effective support measures, he said.

Also at the opening session the State Councillor of China, Peng Peiyun, stated that her Government supported the activities of the Year and endorsed its purposes and principles.

Scheduled to conclude on 28 May, the Beijing meeting will be followed by the United Nations Regional Preparatory Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean to be held in Cartagena, Colombia, from 9 to 14 August. The results of all the regional meetings will be presented to the General Assembly in December at a special meeting to launch the Year.

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The Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has decided to totally reorient the activities of the Programme to implement the mandate entrusted to it under "Agenda 21" - the blueprint for sustainable development for the twenty-first century adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) at Rio de Janeiro last June. The UNEP priorities should change from sensing and monitoring to capacity-building, particularly in developing countries, stressed the Governing Council at the conclusion of its seventeenth session on Friday, 21 May, in Nairobi.

The meeting of the 58-member Governing Council also approved a $120 to $130 million programme budget for the 1994-1995 biennium, subject to availability of funds.

During the session, Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Executive Director of UNEP and Under-Secretary-General responsible for the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), pledged that the UNEP would be the flagship of the United Nations system in human resources management.

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Rotary International is part of an emerging international public opinion in favour of a stronger, broader United Nations, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has said in a statement to Rotary International's 1993 Convention in Melbourne, Australia.

Rotary's support for the United Nations was an outstanding example of cooperation between the Organization and the non-governmental sector, the Secretary-General told the Convention. That sector could provide a permanent pressure group on the international system to ensure that the ideals of the world community were not set aside.

Rotary had provided generous financial and human resources to United Nations agencies and programmes such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the statement said. Through its Category I consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, Rotary was now able to take part on debates within the United Nations system on key issues facing humanity today.

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